

Age-friendly Neighborhood Initiative

Neighborhood Action Plan

Background

There are currently 1.5 million older adults aged 60+ living in New York City and this number is expected to grow to over 1.8 million by 2030. Soon, 1 in every 5 New Yorkers will be an older adult. New York City is a city of neighborhoods and each community is as diverse as its residents, with different resources, strengths and needs, particularly related to older residents. In Council District 1, 18% of residents in the area are currently over the age of 60.

Funded by the New York City Council, the Age-friendly Neighborhood Initiative's mission is to bring forward the concerns and suggestions of older adults in a given community in order to collectively strategize and implement a plan to make the area's economic and civic life more inclusive of older adults. The Age-friendly Neighborhood Initiative utilizes an "age-in-everything" approach to improving the lives of older New Yorkers. The Age-friendly Neighborhood (AFN) model identifies 8 domains of life as a New Yorker that play a particularly important role as we age. Those domains are:

- Outdoor Buildings & Spaces
- Transportation
- Housing
- Respect & Social Inclusion
- Social Participation
- Communication & Information
- Civic Participation & Employment
- Community Support & Health Services

To find out what matters most to older adults in Council District 1, The New York Academy of Medicine partnered with local community organizations – including The New York Public Library, St. Margaret's House, Our Lady of Pompeii, The Caring Community, City Hall Senior Center, Hernandez Senior Center, BRC Senior Center, Chinatown Partnership, Hamilton-Madison House, local Business Improvement Districts, and Manhattan Community Boards 1,2, and 3 – to connect with local residents aged 55+ to hear from them directly about the concerns and needs of older adults in the area. The collected information has been summarized in recommendations to strategically improve built environments, increase access to services, and leverage local resources with the inclusion of older residents in Council District 1.

We collected more than 200 surveys and conducted six key informant interviews, seven focus groups, and three town hall meetings with area residents. Over the past 6 months, we interacted directly with over 300 older adults in your community. From the research that was conducted in Council District 1, we have been able to identify the positive aspects of life in the neighborhood – as identified by older adults – in addition to areas that were identified as in need of improvement.

Council District 1 is undergoing significant growth and development. While this can create opportunities for older adults to work, shop, and enjoy outdoor spaces in the local area, it also creates many challenges that significantly affect how older adults get around and access the

resources they need the most. Council District 1 benefits from a variety of transportation resources, including subways, buses, Access-A-Ride, the C.A.R.T. program, and the Downtown Connection bus, however, accessing each of these can present unique challenges for older adults. Older adults in Council District 1 come from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. They celebrate the diversity of their community, and tend to be very active in their local neighborhoods.

The Age-friendly Neighborhood Initiative was developed to bring local older adults and community stakeholders together to collaboratively implement neighborhood-level changes and improvements which would increase the quality of life of older New Yorkers in your local community. The key findings from the research conducted in Council District 1 and actions to address the concerns and needs of older adults in the area are described below. These findings – and the plan outlined below – will be enacted in partnership with Council Member Margaret Chin, The New York Academy of Medicine, and the local Advisory Committee – which is comprised of a number of community stakeholders – to help ensure proper implementation of these customized working solutions in order to improve their quality of life of older adults in your neighborhood.

Key Findings

- Older adults want to stay in their homes as they get older, but rising costs of living and a lack of senior-appropriate housing is making aging-in-place challenging.
- Hurricane Sandy had a significant impact on residents and businesses in Council District 1, and many older adults want to be better prepared for future emergencies and disasters.
- Mobility is a significant challenge for older adults in Lower Manhattan. Because older adults frequently rely on public transportation to get around, there is an increased need for improved streets and sidewalks. Many respondents complained of narrow or uneven sidewalks and a lack of or damaged curb cutouts. Respondents also expressed concern for traffic safety while crossing streets and called for stricter enforcement of bicycle traffic laws.
- Although there are many restaurants and small stores in the area, older adults may not have access to affordable grocery stores for fresh fruits and vegetables or other healthy foods.
- Most older adults want to be involved with social and community events in their neighborhoods – including more cultural and age-appropriate offerings - and would like a better source of information for finding out about those events, and would like that information in multiple languages.

- Because Council District 1 is so diverse, many older adults expressed that speaking different languages can be a barrier for them to access certain resources, events, or services

Quotes from Key Informants

- *During Irene, before Irene, we went knocking door to door and were horrified to find seniors in wheelchairs that could not leave even though they know the storm was approaching. Their comment, I still remember, we went with trilingual staff - Spanish, Chinese and English - going down the Smith Houses every single floor. Thirteen stories, door by door, we knock on door and some of them said 'Where am I going to go? I'm on wheelchair. I'm safer in here than out there.'*
- *Every human being deserves to be appreciated, and they do that by bringing value and if they can't do that, they lose the respect and dignity they deserve.*
- *Much of lower Manhattan is considered to be a dangerous place for seniors to walk. Broken sidewalks, curb cuts that are impassable, flooded when it's raining, construction bridges, garbage piled up on the sidewalks... construction everywhere.*
- *Zoning for quality and affordability has three major components. One, reducing the regulations for affordable housing and relaxing regulations for senior housing particularly. Two, getting rid of the special approval needed for senior housing and relaxing regulations on what different uses you can have in senior housing, like having mixed use within building. And lastly, the affordable housing component.*
- *The kind of housing stock in this area is problematic. There are bigger buildings with elevators and for seniors living there, it's probably easier for them. But for people who live in smaller buildings, they may live five flights up and that can be very difficult. It is a 'project' for them to get out and a journey for them to get back in.*

- *In the West Village, every few blocks there is a triangle park and that's tremendous... Playgrounds can be wonderful places for seniors but even that can be difficult for them because there are signs in the playgrounds that say you must be accompanied by a child. That's unfortunate because it's joyful for them to watch children play and children tend to have less ambitions and therefore those environments can create more social interaction for them.*
- *There is a real lack of access to information. I don't know if people even know what services are out there to help and maybe there aren't a lot of services. We do have one innovative organization focused on people who have difficulty preparing dinner for themselves. That's a good resource for a limited number of people. Otherwise it is very difficult unless they have friends; difficulty with shopping, difficulty with everything.*
- *All of the parks in the area serve as an extension of the living room. Because the apartments are so small, parks are where a lot of seniors congregate, almost all day, especially in nice weather.*
- *A lot of the seniors learn through word of mouth but then what happens is that these things and programs are detail specific, so incorrect information gets spread quickly.*
- *We need greater building accessibility, and this goes back to the architecture in the area but even some public libraries are not completely accessible.*
- *For those who are frail there is Access-A-Ride but there is not enough. Immigrant communities don't know much about these services and have problems with arranging those services due to language barriers.*
- *There is a big thirst for technology among seniors... We need to help them feel comfortable with these technologies so that they can take advantage of them. They don't just want to get in touch with the world, they want to learn skills for basic necessities and survival.*

Action Plan

The neighborhood action plan is organized into short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. Short term goals can be events that require minimal planning and can be accomplished within 6 months. Mid-term goals can be programs that require planning and may take 6-12 months to establish and/or execute. Long-term goals require significant inter-agency planning and are likely to take over one year to enact.

Short-term Goals:

- *Civic Participation* – Plan an Older Adult Career and Volunteer Fair to connect seniors to local work, volunteer, or educational opportunities.
- *Social Inclusion* – Engage the local Business Improvement Districts to guide mentorship and education for local businesses on how to make adjustments to better serve older adults and people with mobility limitations.
 - *Develop strategies for drawing small businesses, grocery stores, and farmers' markets to local neighborhoods to enhance the availability of affordable, fresh foods*
- *Communication* – Create a plan to better inform older adults of neighborhood resources for aging-in-place, upcoming events, and educational opportunities and provide these resources in multiple languages.
 - *Many older adults rely on word-of-mouth or phone calls to find out about local events. This indicates an increased need for a robust community network to pass information from person to person.*

Medium Term Goals:

- *Housing* – Assess the application requirements and availability of senior housing in the community, in addition to any programs that assess ways to make current housing easier for older residents to age-in-place. Provide important housing information to older adults, particularly with regard to rent control, utilities costs, home maintenance, home mobility and safety. In addition, provide information about resources for older adults to appropriately plan a move to a smaller space.
- *Community Support* – Advocate for an increase in police foot-patrols and crossing guards near bus stops, schools, and residential areas.
 - *Particular concern for enforcement of traffic rules and bicycle use on sidewalks.*
 - *Additional safety concerns for re-routing pedestrians around road and building construction that impede the sidewalk and require mid-street crossing.*
- *Transportation* – Identify locations for potential placement of CityBenches, particularly along bus routes and in locations near commercial areas, shopping hubs, and senior centers.

Long Term Goals:

- *Communication & Emergency Preparedness* – Work with community and government partners to develop emergency preparedness plans and programs specifically for older adults.
 - *Establish an emergency response network of local, city, and state entities to rapidly assist older adults who are stranded in their homes after major emergencies, including high-heat emergencies in summer, and extreme cold weather in winter.*
 - *Evaluate current evacuation procedures with regard to people with varying levels of mobility needs, the need for wheelchair access, and buildings without elevators.*
- *Transportation* – Evaluate current sidewalk and transportation infrastructure and identify ways to improve safety, access, and ease of use for people who have mobility limitations. Assess the reliability and availability of public transportation along existing bus routes and identify ways to improve service frequency and reliability, including:
 - *Improved cross-town bus service for lower Manhattan.*
 - *Extended service for the M*
 - *Improved accessibility at additional subway entrances.*
- *Health Services* – Evaluate the availability of mental health resources and patient-centered care to improve quality of life among older adults in Council District 1.
 - *Provide recognition or incentives to those healthcare providers who emphasize quality of care for older adults, including information about doctors/providers who offer home visits and urgent care facilities with geriatric specialties.*

